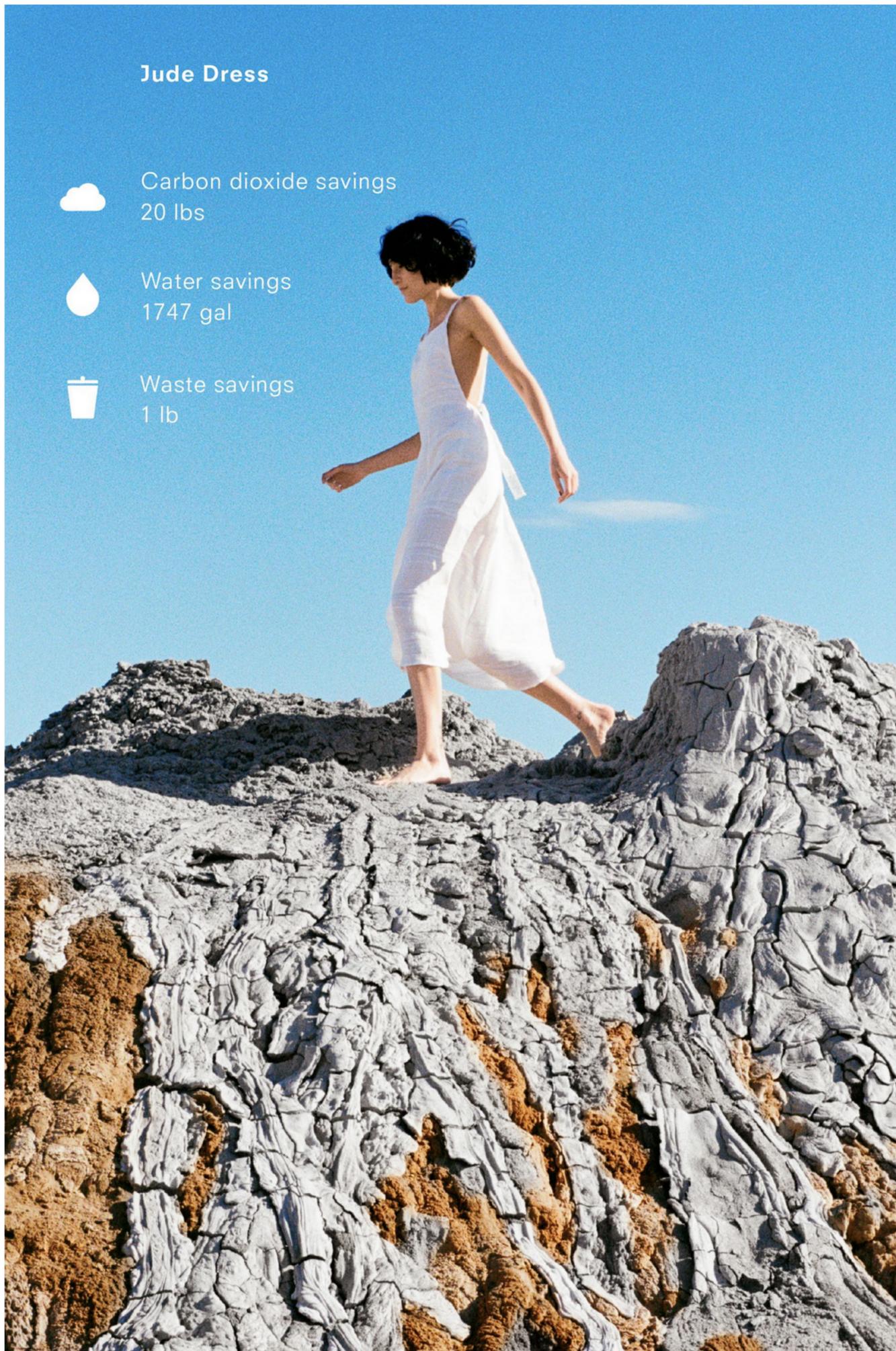


The Ref Scale



Caption

This is an advertisement from the LA-based fashion brand, Reformation. Reformation is a self-defined fast-fashion company that prides itself for focusing on sustainability: their signature slogan reads "Being naked is the #1 most sustainable option. We're #2." This image is representative of the ways in which Reformation markets its vision and version of sustainable fashion to its consumer base. It reveals the company's "Ref Scale" - a quantitative calculation of each garment's environmental savings. For each Reformation garment, the company provides an 'environmental savings' analysis through this scale by indicating the amount of water, CO2, and waste that was "saved" by purchasing a Ref garment (compared to industry standards). This information exists as a personalized dashboard in which customers can track their environmental savings for each garment they purchase. What is less clear, however, is where these calculations come from and how they are determined. Moreover, the Ref Scale for this particular garment is embedded within a visual scene that draws upon a particular ideology of a healthy environment (such as clear, blue skies) and human/environment relations (bare feet as a signifier of being close to nature, white as a sign of purity).

Design Statement

This image shows how the fashion industry uses quantitative data and representations to define and communicate the (environmental) value of their practices and products. It also conveys how the fashion industry, in the very effort to convey new directions, relies on very conventional figurative symbolism (to represent nature and purity, for example).

Project Statement

As an anthropologist focused on sustainable fashion, my research is broadly focused on the study of language and materiality through the intersection of design, economics, and law. In an industry that relies on transnational production processes, visualization is a key strategy used by advocates to document the social and environmental impacts of (fast) fashion. However, it is also an increasingly important tool by which self-declared "conscious" companies distinguish their work. To this end, I am drawn to the paradoxical role of visualization as a key means by which the challenges (and progress) in establishing a more sustainable fashion industry are made transparent. In this essay I include images from branding campaigns of fashion companies that comment on the sustainability of their work in juxtaposition with my own photographs of garments that challenge how we think about the permeation of toxicity in fashion. My goal is to query why visualization is privileged as the medium by which sustainability is made transparent.



Begey, Melissa. 2019. "The Ref Scale: A Consumer's Guide to Measuring Environmental "Savings" in Fashion."

In "Transparent Visualizations and Toxic Fashions." In *Visualizing Toxic Subjects*, curated by James Adams and Kim Fortun. The Center for Ethnography. May.

<https://tinyurl.com/y5k55tpg>

